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REPRESENTATIVE SCHAKOWSKY WARNS THAT SENIORS WILL CONTINUE TO BE GOUGED BY PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES UNLESS CONGRESS PASSES SENSIBLE LEGISLATION JOINS FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL OFFICIALS AT A NEWS CONFERENCE

CHICAGO, IL - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) warned that seniors will continue to be gouged by pharmaceutical companies unless Congress passes sensible legislation at a news conference today in Chicago. Schakowsky joined Representative Luis Guitierrez (D-IL), Cook County Commissioner Roberto Maldonado, Illinois General Assembly Member Jack Franks and representatives of the Illinois State Council of Senior Citizens at the event.

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Below is Schakowsky's statement.

"A few weeks ago, my dog Beau received a bit of good news because of a report I released about the pricing practices of pharmaceutical companies. The report found that drug manufacturers on average charge more than twice as much when drugs are intended for human use than for animal use. So Beau and his dog and cat friends get price breaks from the drug makers and senior citizens who don't have prescription drug coverage are left to pay extortionist prices.

"Two other reports I released last year also found wide spread price discrimination by drug companies. The first report found uninsured seniors living in the Chicago area pay 114% more for their medications as compared to HMOs and insurance companies. The second report concluded that seniors living in the Chicago area pay 80% more for the same drugs sold in Mexico and Canada.

"This is proof positive that seniors are being gouged. But don't take it from me, just listen to this letter from one of my constituents. He writes:

My wife and I are both 74 years of age. Ninette has not been working for a few years, but I am. Back in 1980, I had a malignant kidney removed. In 1997, I had a double by-pass surgery and have since had 5 angiograms, 3 angioplastys, plus having 3 stents in my arteries. □ □ □

Why am I still working? My prescriptions exceed \$100 a month. If I was retired, our cost would be \$12,000 or more a year. At the present time, we are not enrolled in Medicare, choosing to use my medical coverage at work.

I cannot see any way I can retire and hope Congress can pass legislation to help all seniors, especially those on fixed income. I'm 9 years over the present retirement age with no present plans to retire until Congress comes up with suitable legislation.

"What are we waiting for? This is not an isolated case. There are millions of seniors who are struggling every day to make ends meet and find a way to pay for food and their prescriptions."

"In Congress, we can make an immediate difference. We can give seniors access to affordable prescription drugs. Here is how."

"We must pass HR 664, the Prescription Drug Fairness for Seniors Act. This will reduce prices by up to 40%. This is a top priority for me and the Democratic leadership. HR 664 would allow pharmacies to purchase drugs for Medicare beneficiaries at the same low prices available to the federal government and other favored customers, including HMOs and insurance companies."

"We also must pass the Affordable Prescription Drug Act. The bill would force pharmaceutical companies to open their books and disclose what it actually costs to manufacture drugs. The public needs to know why drug companies decide to charge outrageous prices."

"We must add a comprehensive drug benefit to Medicare. Over 13 million seniors don't have any drug coverage. Even those who get private coverage through retiree benefits of Medigap plans would benefit if the federal government uses its bargaining power to negotiate prices."

"Seniors are facing a crisis. And those of us in Congress who are working to bring them affordable prescription drugs are facing a well organized, well financed special interests drug lobby. That is why it is important to let every member of Congress know how important this is. Send a letter or email, call or fax. And soon, we can deliver to senior citizens what they deserve: affordable prescription drugs in their medicine cabinets."